

HELEN KELLER

Before her worldwide fame, Helen Adams Keller (1880-1968) was just a little girl in Alabama who lost both her sight and hearing to a fever in 1882. Her father, Arthur, hired a young graduate of the Perkins School in Boston, Anne Sullivan, who used the most modern special education techniques to break through the child's disabilities. Holding Helen's hand under a flowing water pump, Annie was able to communicate that the letters she was fingerspelling represented objects, actions, ideas. And with the tool of language, Helen's eager young mind did the rest.

Aware of the public relations value of this success, the head of the Perkins School, Michael Anagnos, publicized the story, and Helen and Annie became international sensations. Helen received a formal education and graduated from Radcliffe in 1904, the first person who was deaf-blind to do so.

Helen became a widely-read author and social activist, campaigning for women's suffrage, labor unions, and civil rights, and she was a tireless champion of people with disabilities. Many of her ideas were controversial, even today.

In 1924 Helen went to work for the newly-established American Foundation for the Blind and became its public face, traveling across the globe raising funds and advocating for people who were blind or visually impaired. By the time she died in 1968 she had become an icon.



1947

1950

1954



**MUSEUM OF
THE AMERICAN
PRINTING HOUSE
FOR THE BLIND**
APH.ORG

Photos Courtesy American Foundation for the Blind, Helen Keller Archive

THE PHOTO

1 Built-in bookshelf loaded with braille volumes as well as figurines and whimsical art.

2 Wooden Windsor chair, a style marked by thin round back spindles and a steam bent bowed back.

3 Silk wall hanging from Japan, about 24" square.

4 Pyke-Glauser braillewriter, manufactured by London instrument maker J.M. Glauser and Sons Probably given to Helen by the National Institute for the Blind during her visit in 1946.

5 Wooden stand with a relief sculpture of a human face.

6 Bust of Dolores Ibárruri (1895-1989) by Jo Davidson (1883-1952). Ibárruri was a noted Spanish Communist. Davidson was one of Helen's leftist friends.

7 Sculpture of Matsuo Bashō (1644-1694) by Hirakushi Denchū (1872-1979). Matsuo Bashō was the most famous Japanese poet of his day. Helen visited Japan on three different occasions.

Helen Keller is seated at her desk in the study of her home in Arcan Ridge, Connecticut. She wears a dark dress with an embroidered collar and sleeves, and a metallic necklace whose details are hard to see. Her hair is short and wavy. She has an intent, look on her face as her left hand reads a sheet of braille in a machine in front of her. 1954.



Photo Courtesy American Foundation for the Blind, Helen Keller Archive

8 Bust of Tashiro Furukawa (1845-1907), a pioneer educator for people who were blind or visually impaired in Japan.

9 Mid-century desk made of wood, 72" wide, with a raised lip on the edge to keep things from sliding off. The desk was purchased for Helen in 1947 after most of her possessions were destroyed in a house fire.

10 Small alarm clock sold by the American Foundation for the Blind. The glass was removed and raised dots on the clock face let the user tell time by touch.

16 There is a large three-part picture window behind Helen, with striped curtains pulled to the side and venetian blinds raised. Helen's assistant, Polly Thompson wrote a friend, "I get utter happiness when I see Helen at her desk with the sun pouring in."

15 Remington Rand Noiseless No. 10 Typewriter. After composing on a braillewriter, Helen would type her writings for submission to various publishers.

14 A "studio couch" (backless sofa), upholstered in blue.

13 The ears of a dog poke out from behind the right side of the desk. Helen loved pets and had dogs most of her life. This is her German Shepherd Attu.

12 Enameled planter, containing an arrowhead plant and a trailing philodendron.

11 Several stacks of braille notes, tied with string and held down by paperweights. Before air conditioners, paperweights were essential, protecting piles of paper from gusts of wind entering through open windows.